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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 SANAA 000414

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PBTS](#) [SA](#) [YM](#) [COUNTER TERRORISM](#) [ECON COM](#)

SUBJECT: BEHIND THE SCENES ON YEMEN-SAUDI BORDER COOPERATION

REF: A. SANAA 381

[B](#). RIYADH 822

[C](#). FBIS GMP 2004022200185

Classified By: DCM Alan G. Misenheimer for reasons 1.5 (b and d)

[1](#). (s) Summary: President Saleh told CDA on February 19 that DCI George Tenent played a major role in facilitating the new border agreement between Saudi Arabia and Yemen. Both countries agreed to halt new construction and begin joint Ministry of Interior patrols. A resolution was a political necessity for Saleh who likely felt pressure from tribes who had lost lucrative cross-border trade after the barriers were erected. End summary.

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Saleh: Tenent's Role Important  
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[2](#). (s) On the margins of President Saleh's February 19 meeting with members of a congressional staff delegation in the port city of Mukallah, CDA congratulated Saleh on his successful Feb 17/18 trip to Saudi Arabia. Saleh replied, "George Tenent spoke with the Saudis two days before me, and his role was important." (NFI) Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Planning and International Cooperation Ahmed Sofan also told CDA that Saleh was pleased with the DCI's role.

[3](#). (s) Later that same day, FM Abubakr al-Qirbi told CDA that "Saleh had to go" to Saudi Arabia, adding that Saleh's successful negotiations with Crown Prince Abdullah was a significant step for Yemen. Echoing comments by DPM Sofan, Qirbi said Saleh found Abdullah "unaware" of this issue, but once notified was immediately responsive to ROYG concerns. In a separate conversation on the return flight from Mukallah, Deputy Foreign Minister Mustafa Noman privately questioned the explanation, and wondered out loud how Abdullah could be unaware of an 8 million USD expenditure. He commented that Yemen was obliged to accept the Saudi position as stated.

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ROYG: Despite Loopholes Claimed by Saudis,  
Construction Violates Jeddah Agreement  
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[4](#). (s) DFM Noman described Saudi construction as complying in the "technical sense" of the Jeddah Agreement because the agreement prohibits any construction in the 20 km border area that obscures vision across the landscape. The Saudi position, according to Noman, is that the construction of pipes anchored vertically in the ground and linked by wire does not impede vision and thus is permissible under the agreement. Noman stressed that the ROYG believes that the Saudi position is disingenuous because the barriers clearly violate both the spirit and the letter of the agreement.

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Solution: Cessation of Construction and Joint Patrols  
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[5](#). (s) DFM Noman said the agreement includes a freeze on Saudi construction (no dismantling of existing structures), and upcoming talks will work out details for stepped-up joint patrols that will stop smuggling "and render the barriers unnecessary." However, in an interview with al-Arabiyya (ref c), Saleh claimed that barriers would be dismantled. Many papers Yemeni repeated this claim. Saleh also said further negotiations would be conducted by the Ministries of Interiors. In a 2/23 meeting, MFA Director of the Arab World Department Abdullah Matar told Pol/Econ Chief that an agreement had been signed by both Interior Ministers, but that the issue of whether to cease construction and/or dismantle the barriers was not decided, but would be worked out by "committees,"

[6](#). (s) DPM Sofan underscored the political necessity of an agreement for the ROYG. He said that the Saudi barrier stopped legitimate cross-border movement by tribes on both sides of the border. Sofan said they were not engaged in smuggling per se, i.e. they were not smuggling arms, explosives or facilitating the transit of terrorists. But, Sofan reiterated, their ability to move freely across the border is vital to the tribes. Sofan commented that Saleh was compelled to intervene directly when talks by the

Interior Minister and Foreign Minister failed to yield any progress at all.

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Comment: Balancing Security and Economic Needs  
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17. (s) Comment: While the ROYG and the SAG have not yet completely resolved their differences over the Saudi's construction of barriers, the defusing of this dispute is a step forward for Yemeni/SAG cooperation (ref b). While the tribes described by DPM Sofan may or may not be smuggling arms, they are likely trafficking household goods, foodstuffs and cars, which provide the livelihood for many border tribes and businessmen throughout the country. DPM Sofan clearly implied that the tribes put pressure on Saleh to pursue a resolution and future cooperation will have to continue to balance political, economic and security needs for both countries. End comment.  
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